

## BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: ON A DOE, A DEVILISH HUNTER, AND JEWISH-CHRISTIAN POLEMICS

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**Abstract:** *Hunting scenes are common in Jewish illuminated manuscripts and are understood as allegories of the Jew, usually represented as a hare or a deer, being persecuted by the Christian, shown as a hunter and his dogs. This article will discuss a hunt scene from the Worms Mahzor, an Ashkenazic illuminated prayer book produced in 1272, probably in Würzburg. At the top of folio 130r, an illumination of the piyyut (liturgical poem) “‘Ayelet ‘ahavim” (the loving hind, or doe) for Shavuot displays a deer being hunted by a devilish hunter and his dogs. Examining the illustration in the context of contemporary textual evidence, I shall demonstrate that the deer in the Worms Mahzor portrays the Torah itself being persecuted by the hunter, who can be understood not only as a Christian or Esau, but also as Jesus.*

Hebrew illuminated manuscripts contain many miniatures of animals, among them some portraying hunt scenes. Medieval Jews were not generally known to have engaged in the sport of hunting,<sup>1</sup> so we should question what such images meant to the Jewish audience of those manuscripts. As Kurt Schubert and numerous other scholars of Jewish art have demonstrated, hunting scenes are common in Jewish illuminated manuscripts, and can be understood as allegories of the Jew, usually represented as a hare or a deer, being persecuted by the Christian, depicted as a hunter and his dogs.<sup>2</sup>

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1. That said, it should be mentioned that Leor Jacobi recently published on medieval Jewish hawking and falconry practices that appear to have been marginal; see Leor Jacobi, “Jewish Hawking in Medieval France: Falconry, Rabbenu Tam, and the Tosafists,” *Oqimta* 1 (2013): 421–504; Jacobi, “The Rabbis on the Hunt: From Palestine to Poland,” in *Falconry: Its Influence on Biodiversity and Cultural Heritage*, ed. Urszula Szymak and Przemysław Sianko (Białystok: Podlaskie Museum, 2016), 169–86.

2. Meir Ayali, “Halakhah and Aggadah in Haggadah Illustrations” [in Hebrew], *‘Ale-Siah* 15, no. 16 (1982): 262–68; Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997); Elliot Horowitz, “Odd Couples: The Eagle and the Hare, the Lion and the Unicorn,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 11 (2004): 252–58; Sara Offenberg, “Expressions of Meeting the Challenges of the Christian Milieu in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature” [in Hebrew] (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2008), chap. 4; Offenberg, “Illuminations of *Kol Nidrei* in Two Ashkenazi Mahzorim,” *Ars Judaica* 7 (2011): 7–16; Kurt Schubert, “Wikkuaach-Thematik in den Illustrationen Hebräischer Handschriften,” *Jewish Art* 12–13 (1986–1987): 247–56.

In most cases, the hunter represents a nobleman in Christian art and literature. These depictions appear in various media, including illuminated manuscripts (where they can appear as the main scene or in the margins),<sup>3</sup> sculptures, wall paintings, and textiles. While the noblest of all was the deer hunt, the subjects of the chase are diverse: deer hunts with dogs or bow and arrow, falconry, boar hunts, and hare hunts.<sup>4</sup> White dogs with black spots often represent the Dominican friars, who are also known as “dogs of the Lord” (*domini canes*). Black and white dogs that represent the friars are seen in Andrea di Bonaiuto’s representation of the Dominican friars as Dalmatian dogs in the fresco *Allegory of the Triumphant Church and the Dominican Order*, in the Spanish Chapel at the Santa Maria Novella in Florence, painted in 1365–1367 (fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> Schubert has demonstrated that the same dogs may also symbolize the Dominican friars or Christian persecutors of the Jews in general in the Sephardic *Rylands Haggadah*.<sup>6</sup> The dog is associated with the image of the hunter, especially the biblical hunter Esau, who had long symbolized the Christians in Jewish art and culture.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to Christian art, in Jewish art the hunter plays a negative role and is sometimes ridiculed.<sup>8</sup>

One such hunt scene is portrayed in the *Worms Maḥzor*,<sup>9</sup> an Ashkenazic illuminated prayer book produced in 1272, probably in Würzburg (fig. 2). At the top of folio 130r (fig. 2a), the opening text of the Yozer (a liturgical poem read in the

3. Michael Camille, *Images on the Edge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Lilian Randall, *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

4. Richard Almond, *Medieval Hunting* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2003), 131–32; Derek Pearsall, “Hunting Scenes in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts,” *Connoisseur* 196 (1977): 170–81.

5. Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, “Art and Sermons: Dominicans and the Jews in Florence’s Santa Maria Novella,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 92 (2012): 171–200. See also Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpreters: Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 137–44.

6. Schubert, “Wikkuach-Thematik,” 251–54. The manuscript is found at Manchester, John Rylands University Library, MS. Ryl. Hebr. 6, fol. 29. The entire manuscript is available online: <https://luna.manchester.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/Manchester%20%20606%20154968?qvq=q:haggadah&mi=1&trs=191>.

7. Gerson Cohen, “Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 19–48.

8. Schubert, “Wikkuach-Thematik”; Ursula Schubert, “Zwei Tierszenen am ende der Ersten Kennicott-Bibel la Coruna, 1476, in Oxford,” *Journal of Jewish Art* 12–13 (1986–1987): 83–88. For a positive interpretation of dogs in Hebrew illuminated haggadot from the fifteenth century, where the dog represents the coming of Elijah, see Chana Shacham-Rosby, “Elijah the Prophet: The Guard Dog of Israel,” *Jewish History* 30 (2016): 165–82.

9. See the facsimile edition: *Ms. Jewish National and University Library. Heb. 4 781/1. Complete facsimile in original size: (Introductory volume)*, ed. Malachi Beit-Arié (Vaduz: Cylar Establishment; Jerusalem: Jewish National University Library, 1985). The entire manuscript is available online: [http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/digitalibrary/pages/viewer.aspx?&presentorid=MANU-SCRIPTS&docid=PNX\\_MANUSCRIPTS000044560-1](http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/digitalibrary/pages/viewer.aspx?&presentorid=MANU-SCRIPTS&docid=PNX_MANUSCRIPTS000044560-1); Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *La mahzor enluminé: Les voies de formation d’un programme iconographique* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 14–15.



Figure 1.  
Andrea da Firenze, Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, fresco,  
1365–1367.

morning) “Ayelet ’ahavim” (The loving doe, or hind) for Shavuot is illuminated.<sup>10</sup> Normally, in medieval *maḥzorim*, only the first piyyut for a given holiday or Shabbat is illuminated, and it is this single poem that is addressed in the scholarship concerning the image. However, it is my contention that because this illumination relates to the entire holiday of Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks), it should be interpreted in the broader context of the piyyut commentaries and rabbinic literature related to the piyyut in question, not only with the text it adorns in immediate proximity.<sup>11</sup> The connection between text and image in illuminated manuscripts is important, because just as their reading and viewing audience “read” them together, so too can we profit from understanding the scene in both its immediate and broader context.

In a recent article, Katrin Kogman-Appel discusses methodological aspects of what she refers to as the “three-way relationship” among patrons, artists, and

10. Israel Davidson, *Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry* [in Hebrew] (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1970), 1:2960; Daniel Goldschmidt, *Mahzor for Shavuot* (Jerusalem: Koren, 2000), 104–7.

11. Katrin Kogman-Appel, *A Mahzor from Worms: Art and Religion in a Medieval Jewish Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–35; Kogman-Appel, “Books for Communal Liturgy and Domestic Worship: Structure, Function, and Illustration of the Mahzor and the Haggadah,” in *Liturgische Bücher in der Kulturgeschichte Europas*, ed. Hanns-Peter Neuheuser, Bibliothek und Wissenschaft 51 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 101–37; Sarit Shalev-Eyni, “The Aural-Visual Experience in the Ashkenazi Ritual Domain of the Middle Ages,” in *Resounding Images: Medieval Intersections of Art, Music and Sound*, ed. Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 189–204; Sed-Rajna, *La mahzor enluminé*. On the types of piyyutim in Ashkenaz, see Ezra Fleischer, *Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in the Middle Ages*, 2nd enlarged ed. (Jerusalem: Keter, 2007), 442–66.



Figure 2.  
*Worms Mahzor*, Würzburg (?), 1272. Ms. Heb. 4 781/I, fol. 130r, The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

viewers, as well as the hierarchy between the textual and visual elements of Hebrew illuminated manuscripts.<sup>12</sup> Images are not mere illustrations of texts, but rather, they extend the meaning of the text; moreover, images unpack or divulge latent cultural traditions not easily articulated in discursive text. A major factor in evaluating the patron's intention and the artist's implementation of the illustrations in relation to the texts is whether the manuscript was intended for communal use in the synagogue or for private use. When an idea appears in an illuminated manuscript, particularly one used by the whole community (e.g., the *mahzor*, in our case, or the giant Ashkenazic Masoretic Bible), it attests to concepts that were considered acceptable in a public forum, even if the idea was not understood clearly by all members of the congregational community.

Let us turn to the image (fig. 2a), where a hunting scene adorns the initial word 'ayelet (doe). On the right, a hybrid, devilish hunter wears a red dress and a green cap typical of a hunting costume of the period.<sup>13</sup> The hunter is portrayed in grotesque profile, blowing a hunting horn, which he grasps in his right hand, while he holds a leashed brown dog in his left; his legs resemble those of a

12. Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Pictorial Messages in Mediaeval Illuminated Hebrew Books: Some Methodological Considerations," in *Jewish Manuscript Cultures: New Perspectives*, ed. Irina Wandrey (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 443–46.

13. On the hunter's costumes, see John Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 178–79.





Figure 2a.  
Detail, *Worms Mahzor*.

rooster. On the left side of the image, in front of the hunter, two dogs chase a deer. The grey one has caught it by its leg as it climbs a mountain.

This miniature has been discussed in previous studies;<sup>14</sup> however, I would like to elaborate on it further and propose that over and beyond the symbolism of hunted Jews, it references an actual Jewish-Christian polemic and resistance to conversion. As Kurt Schubert already mentioned, the hunter's diabolical appearance is based on hunting associations in both Jewish and Christian cultures. My understanding of the scene is that the hunter refers simultaneously to Esau, Christians, and the antimessiah—Armilus. Several layers of interpretation mingle in the *mahzor*'s illustration, which can be unraveled by analyzing both text and image together, in relation to the literary and historical context of the manuscript production. Hence, in order to approach the allegorical meaning of the animals in the hunt scene, we first need to examine the piyyut's text, along with related Jewish and Christian texts and images.

In our illumination, the word “doe” (*‘ayelet*) is understood literally to mean a doe, but its symbolic significance is open to interpretation. The first phrase of the piyyut “‘Ayelet ‘ahavim” (A loving doe) is based on Proverbs 5:19: “A loving doe, a graceful mountain goat.” In this verse, “A loving doe” has been interpreted as

14. Schubert, “Wikkuach-Thematik”; Bezalel Narkiss and Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, “The Illumination of the Worms Mahzor,” in Beit-Arié, *Ms. Jewish National and University Library. Heb. 4 781/1*, 79–89; Sed-Rajna, *La mahzor enluminé*, 20; Sarit Shalev-Eyni, “Between Interpretation and Destruction: Image, Text and Context in the Illuminated Ashkenazi Mahzor” [in Hebrew], in *Jewish Prayer: New Perspectives*, ed. Uri Ehrlich (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016), 355–74.

referring to the Torah,<sup>15</sup> as we see in the Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 54b: “Said R. Samuel bar Nahmani, ‘What is the meaning of this verse of Scripture: “Loving hind and graceful roe” [Prov 5:19]? Why were words of the Torah compared to a hind? To tell you, just as a hind ... so words of the Torah are beloved.’”<sup>16</sup>

This concept is also described in various piyyut commentaries of Ashkenazic manuscripts. The need for piyyut commentary emerged, according to Elisabeth Hollender, from the difficulty of understanding poetic words and phrases in the piyyutim. The elevated status of piyyutim in the eyes of the commentators is evident from the very fact that they dedicated commentaries to them, as they were seen as an integral part of the synagogue service and religious tradition. Although in most cases we know the names of the *paytanim* (authors of piyyutim), there are few piyyut commentaries where we can identify the author’s name clearly, so that, as in our case, most of these authors remain anonymous.<sup>17</sup> A commentary to “‘Ayelet ‘ahavim” appears in the *Tripartite Mahzor* (figs. 3–3a),<sup>18</sup> alongside a hunt scene, and the text relates to some of the elements we are discussing here.<sup>19</sup>

In the illuminated scene from the *Worms Mahzor*, the doe has been understood as symbolizing the Jewish people, persecuted by the Christians, who are represented by the hunter and his dogs. If, according to the Talmud, the Torah is referred to as “the loving hind,” then the doe in our scene may be understood as an allegory for the Torah, not only for the Jews. A thorough reexamination of the visual motif of the hunt, against the background of the context communicated in the liturgical hymn, can help elucidate this interpretation.

The liturgical poem that this scene illustrates deals with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the main event celebrated during the Feast of Weeks. That, alongside the notion of the doe as representing the Torah, leads us to the question: What does a hunt scene have to do with the meaning of the piyyut? After all, the painter could have portrayed just the doe/deer<sup>20</sup> without depicting the hunter and his dogs chasing after it. The answer to this question may be found in the text of the piyyut itself. Typical of the genre, the piyyut adapts numerous biblical verses,<sup>21</sup> in this case the context of an entire chapter, where we find that the concept of the chase is referred to repeatedly. If we look elsewhere for

15. Goldschmidt, *Mahzor for Shavuot*, 104.

16. *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. Jacob Neusner (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011).

17. There are ten remaining manuscripts from German lands and France with a commentary on this piyyut. Elisabeth Hollender, *Clavis Commentariorum of Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in Manuscript* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 234; Hollender, *Piyyut Commentary in Medieval Ashkenaz* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 2–6.

18. Add. Ms. 22413, fol. 49, British Library, London. See the volume at [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_22413](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_22413). Sarit Shalev-Eyni, “The Tripartite Mahzor” (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 2001), 79–82.

19. Tripartite Mahzor, fols. 49–50.

20. As in the *Hammelburg Mahzor*, Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, Cod. Or. 13, fol. 150v, produced in 1348.

21. On artistic ways of writing such piyyutim in this manuscript see David Stern, “‘Jewish’ Art and the Making of the Medieval Prayerbook,” *Ars Judaica* 6 (2010): 23–44.



Figure 3.

*Tripartite Mahzor*, Lake Constance area, c. 1322. Add. Ms. 22413, fol. 49, British Library, London.

references to help explain the dogs in our scene, we might turn first to Psalm 22. Here the doe is *'ayelet ha-shahar* (dawn): “[For the leader; on *'ayelet ha-shahar*] ... Dogs surround me; a pack of evil ones closes in on me, like lions [they maul] my hands and feet ... But You, O LORD, be not far off; my strength, hasten to my aid. Save my life from the sword, my precious life from the clutches of a dog” (lines 17–21). Here we learn that the Bible itself includes the imagery of a deer being persecuted by dogs.

Scholars have presumed that our illustrated chase scene symbolizes the gentiles chasing Israel, but the deer here has a double meaning: it represents both the persecuted Jews, as well as the Torah given to them at Mount Sinai. According to Madeline Harrison Caviness, the educated medieval viewer would have been expected to perceive iconography as multivalent; thus, a given image could have had multiple, overlapping meanings.<sup>22</sup> The *Worms Mahzor* suggests that the Torah itself is persecuted by the hunter. In what follows, I shall try to

22. Madeline Harrison Caviness, “Reception of Images by Medieval Viewers,” in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. C. Rudolph (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 71–72.



Figure 3a.  
Detail, *Tripartite Mahzor*.

demonstrate that the illumination has more than one meaning, and that the hunter, as well as each of the animals, is an allegorical figure for more than one character.

According to Jewish tradition, the people of Israel received the Torah at Mount Sinai. The piyyut emphasizes that this event occurred specifically at Mount Sinai, not at any other mountain. The word “Sinai” repeats over and again in this piyyut, and our manuscript emphasizes the word, written in red. One of the piyyut’s phrases is based on Psalm 68:16: “O majestic mountain, Mount Bashan; O jagged mountain, Mount Bashan.” In the words of the piyyut, “High hills rushed to precede Sinai / [this is] the hill [which] God desireth to dwell in Mount Sinai.”<sup>23</sup>

As I argued above, the deer represents not only the Jews but the Torah as well. Thus Mount Sinai is highlighted in the piyyut to emphasize the concept that the true Torah and the true Law were given at Mount Sinai, and that the new Law, or more precisely the New Testament of the Christians, is entirely false.<sup>24</sup> Just as the “high hills” seek to precede Mount Sinai and assume its rightful place as the mountain upon which the Torah was given, so, too, Christians appropriate the Torah as if it were an asset of theirs. The dogs represent gentiles persecuting

23. חשו גבנונים לקדם לסיני / חמד אלהים לשבתו הר-סיני.

24. On the relation between the making of Torah codices in Ashkenaz and Jewish-Christian relations see David Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 105–26.



Israel, but they can also symbolize Christians, who adopt the Old Testament for their own needs when it suits them, particularly as a polemical tool against the Jews.

This scene should be interpreted in the contemporary context of the 1240 Paris Talmud trial between Rabbi Yehiel of Paris and the convert Nicholas Donin.<sup>25</sup> This was the first of three major public disputes initiated by converted Jews,<sup>26</sup> where the Talmud was the main focus of debate.<sup>27</sup> One purpose of the mendicant orders in waging these trials was to Christianize the Jews. In so doing, they culled citations from the Talmud as proofs that the rabbis had already acknowledged Jesus as the true messiah.<sup>28</sup> Jews were aware of their role as the mission's target. Evidence of Christian intentions surrounded them throughout the urban space.<sup>29</sup> The public disputes reflected a spiritual persecution of Jewry that compounded their physical persecution. Christians, guided by converted Jews, also attacked the Talmud as a blasphemous and heretical book. An aftermath of the 1240 trial was the public burning of the Talmud in 1242.<sup>30</sup> Thus, on the one hand, the Talmud

25. We have Hebrew accounts of the Talmud trial and a Latin text. Judah D. Galinsky, "The Different Hebrew Versions of the 'Talmud Trial' of 1240 in Paris," in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations: In Honor of David Berger*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach and Jacob J. Schacter (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 132–37. The Latin text was originally published by Isadore Loeb, "La controverse de 1240 sur le Talmud," *Revue des études juives* 3 (1881): 39–57. For an English translation of the Latin text see Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1982), 163–67.

26. Piero Capelli, "Jewish Converts in Jewish-Christian Intellectual Polemics in the Middle Ages," in *Intricate Interfaith Networks in the Middle Ages: Quotidian Jewish-Christian Contacts*, ed. Ephraim Shoham-Steiner (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 33–83; Harvey Hames, "Reason and Faith: Inter-religious Polemic and Christian Identity in the Thirteenth Century," in *Religious Apologetics—Philosophical Argumentation*, ed. Yossef Schwartz and Volkhard Krech (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 267–84; Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 121–42; Paola Tartakoff, "Testing Boundaries: Jewish Conversion and Cultural Fluidity in Medieval Europe, c. 1200–1391," *Speculum* 90 (2015): 728–62.

27. Robert Leon Chazan, John Friedman, and Jean Hoff, *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240* (Toronto: Pontifical Inst. of Mediaeval Studies, 2012). For more on the political and theological reasons that led to this trial, see Yossef Schwartz, "Authority, Control, and Conflict in Thirteenth-Century Paris: Contextualizing the Talmud Trial," in *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth-Century France*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten and Judah Galinsky (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 93–110.

28. Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 30–37; Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 226–30; Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Daniel J. Lasker, "Jewish Anti-Christian Polemics in Light of Mass Conversion to Christianity," in *Polemical Encounters: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2019), 103–16.

29. Daniel J. Lasker, "The Jewish Critique of Christianity: In Search of a New Narrative," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 6 (2011): 1–9.

30. Paul Lawrence Rose, "When Was the Talmud Burnt at Paris? A Critical Examination of the Christian and Jewish Sources and a New Dating: June 1241," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 62 (2011): 324–39.

was exploited as a tool to convince Jews that the messiah had already arrived, but on the other hand, it was rejected as heretical.

In 1263, R. Moses ben Naḥman (Naḥmanides) defended the Talmud in Barcelona from the attacks of the convert Pablo Christiani, who afterward disputed with Rabbi Abraham at the second Paris trial in 1271/1273.<sup>31</sup> In both of the Paris trials, Rabbi Yehiel and Rabbi Abraham used the term “Torah” to refer to the Talmud, rather than “the Oral Torah” or simply “Talmud”; indeed, they deliberately used the word “Torah.”

Testimony to the experience of persecution targeting the Talmud can be found in an elegy composed by the Maharam of Rothenburg (Rabbi Meir ben Barukh, d. 1293), “Sha’ali serufah ba’esh” (Ask, you who were burned by fire).<sup>32</sup> The elegy emphasizes that the Talmud that was burned was indeed part of the Torah given to Moses at Sinai, as expressed in the verse: “Sinai, for that the Lord choose you.” “Sinai,” referring to the Torah given to Moses, is mentioned in the context of the burned Talmud. The author alludes to the New Testament by asking: “Is there a new Torah, and for that they burned your scrolls?”<sup>33</sup> The text expresses Maharam’s mourning over the burning of the Talmud, without doubt referring to the events in Paris and the Jews in Ashkenaz.

Susan L. Einbinder’s description of the situation in northern France in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries could well apply to other regions of

31. Susan L. Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 70–99; William Chester Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews: From Philip Augustus to the Last Capetians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 137–44; Reuben Margalio, ed., *R. Yehiel of Paris’s Dispute* (Leviv: Margalio, 1910); Gilbert Dahan with Élie Nicolas, eds., *Le brûlement du Talmud à Paris, 1242–1244*, postface by René-Samuel Sirat (Paris: Cerf, 1999); Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Chazan, “From Friar Paul to Friar Raymond: The Development of Innovative Missionizing Argumentation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 289–306; Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jews in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 319–42; Cohen, “The Second Paris Dispute and the Jewish Christian Polemic in the Thirteenth Century” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 68 (1999): 557–79; Saadia Eisenberg, “Reading Medieval Religious Disputation: The 1240 ‘Debate’ between Rabbi Yehiel of Paris and Friar Nicholas Donin” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008); Hames, “Reason and Faith”; Maurice Kriegel, “Le procès et le brûlement du Talmud, 1239–1248,” in *Saint Louis et les juifs: Politique et idéologie sous le règne de Louis IX*, ed. Paul Salmona and Juliette Sibon (Paris: Éditions du Patrimoine, 2015), 105–12; David Malkiel, *Reconstructing Ashkenaz: The Human Face of Franco-German Jewry, 1000–1250* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Daniela Müller, “Die Pariser Verfahren gegen den Talmud von 1240 und 1248 im Kontext von Papsttum und französischem Königtum,” in *Interaction between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and Literature*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Joseph Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 181–99; Ursula Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation von Paris 1269* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2001); Joseph Shatzmiller, *La deuxième controverse de Paris* (Paris: E. Peeters, 1994); Haym Soloveitchik, “Catastrophe and Halakic Creativity: Ashkenaz—1096, 1242, 1306 and 1298,” *Jewish History* 12 (1998): 71–85.

32. Daniel Goldschmidt, *Order of the Lamentations for the 9th of Av* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Koren, 1976/7), 135–37; Joseph Isaac Lifshitz, *Rabbi Meir and the Foundation of Jewish Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 43.

33. My translation. ואשאל היש תורה חדשה. בכך שרפו גלילך.

Ashkenaz: “In northern France, royal and ecclesiastical policies converged in an escalation of pressures on Jewish communities, with the ultimate aim of conversion. And throughout this period, and in addition to the coerced baptisms that accompanied mob attacks and judicial terror, Jews converted. Indeed, not all were convinced to do so by the sword. The omnipresent signs of Christian flourishing and triumph lay before their eyes, and for medieval eyes those signs held a kind of truth it was hard to contest. In addition, the sheer difficulty of day-to-day life must have had a persuasive force of its own.”<sup>34</sup> In Germany, Berthold of Regensburg (d. 1272), preaching from the 1240s to the 1260s, grouped the Jews together with heretics, who were already outlawed.<sup>35</sup> In one of his sermons, he assailed the Talmud and the Jews: “Their twelve [leaders?] hastily convened and composed a book, which is called Talmud. It is completely heretical, and it contains such damned heresy that it is bad that they live.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, Berthold’s preaching provided his audience with an informal *carte blanche* for physical violence against Jews, regardless of its formal legality. In this context, the image in the *Worms Mahzor* subtly warns the Jewish viewer and encourages him or her to withstand the onslaught of Christianity.

Let us now return to look more closely at our scene. The image of the hunter in the *Worms Mahzor* has previously been interpreted as symbolizing Christians pursuing and persecuting Jews. This perspective is based on conventional conceptions of the image of Esau, who has long symbolized Christians in Jewish texts. Esau is described as a hunter in Genesis 25:27: “Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors.” Esau is the father of Edom, traditionally identified with Rome, and since the fourth century, also with Christianity. Almost every reference to Esau in late antique and medieval Jewish literature is a reference to Edom and to Christianity.<sup>37</sup> Hence, identifying the figure in the scene as Esau seems eminently reasonable. However, following this symbolic calculus to its next logical step suggests another character portrayed in the scene: the hunter may represent not only the Christians, or Edom/Esau, but even Jesus himself. A closer focus on the image of the hunter can support the plausibility of this proposition.

34. Einbinder, *Beautiful Death*, 114.

35. Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 226–34; Alexander Fidora, “The Influence of the *Extractiones de Talmud* on Anti-Jewish Sermons from the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries,” in *The Talmud in Dispute during the High Middle Ages*, ed. Alexander Fidora and Görg K. Hasselhoff (Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Servei de Publicacions, 2019), 235–47.

36. Berthold von Regensburg, *Vollständige Ausgabe seiner Predigten*, ed. Franz Pfeiffer (Berlin: Wien Braumüller, 1965), 1:401 (first published 1862–1880). I used Jeremy Cohen’s translation, in *Friars and the Jews*, 134.

37. According to Gerson Cohen, the tradition of Esau and Edom as symbolizing Rome can be traced back to Rabbi Akiva (cf. Genesis Rabbah 65:21). This association with Rome was turned toward Christianity during the Middle Ages. According to Cohen, medieval Jews believed that “Esau might exchange his eagle for a cross, but he was Esau nonetheless.” Cohen, “Esau as Symbol,” 29. See also Offenberg, “Expressions of Meeting the Challenges,” 113–18; Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

As mentioned above, the hunter is portrayed as a hybrid creature, revealing his devilish nature. In Christian art, we find images of hybrid hunters frequently, but our case is no mere copy of a Christian model; rather, the artist apparently intended to portray the hunter as demonic in a Jewish context. In other hunt scenes in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, the hunter is not generally portrayed as demonic; rather, he is often depicted as a plain human being (for example, in the aforementioned *Tripartite Mahzor*, fig. 3).

In this case, as Kurt Schubert has demonstrated, the hunter's face and legs characterize him as a devil.<sup>38</sup> In rabbinic literature, cocks' feet are considered a sign of demons; for example, in B. Berakhot 6a: "Abba Benjamin says, 'If the eye had the power to see them, no creature could withstand the demons.' ... If someone wants to know that they are here, take ashes and sprinkle them around the bed, and in the morning, he will see something like footprints of a cock." The source is also cited in Rashi's commentary on B. Gittin 68b: "To see whether it is a demon ... since the demon's legs are like those of a cock." In another Ashkenazic *mahzor*, produced circa 1270–1290,<sup>39</sup> the image of a demon overcome by the power of a Jewish figure blowing the shofar is recognizable among others by his rooster talon legs (fig. 5). These sources establish the correspondence between cocks' legs and demons in the Jewish imagination, so we need not assume that the image of the hunter in the *Worms Mahzor* follows Christian conventions for depicting a demonic creature. Furthermore, the hunter generally represents the nobleman in Christian art,<sup>40</sup> but in our Jewish manuscript, the hunter is grotesque and devilish, diametrically opposed to the Christian representation. Thus, the image in the *Worms Mahzor* appears to mock Christian nobility through subversion of its symbolism.

The hunter can be identified as an evil creature not only by his legs, but also by his grotesque profile. Schubert wrote that his nose resembles that of a pig's, but in my opinion the hunter's profile is virtually identical to that of the dog he holds by its leash (fig. 4). The rabbis described the dog faces of women in sculptures of pagan idols.<sup>41</sup> The Babylonian Talmud, Temurah 28b, explains that the "face of [the male idol] Molekh should be called face of the dog."<sup>42</sup> The hunter is a hybrid, dressed like a man, but with demonic rooster legs and the dog face of

38. Schubert, "Wikkuach-Thematik."

39. Kaufmann Ms. A 388, vol. II, fol. 12v, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, Budapest. The entire manuscript is available online: <http://kaufmann.mtak.hu/en/ms388a/ms388a-coll1.htm>. On this image see Ilia Rodov, "Dragons: A Symbol of Evil in European Synagogue Decorations," *Ars Judaica* 1 (2005): 71.

40. Such as the example from the Codex Manesse, produced in Zurich in the years 1305–1340, displaying Konrad von Suonegge (1220–1241) hunting a deer. Cod. Pal. Germ 848, fol. 202v, Heidelberg Universitätsbibliothek. On Codex Manesse, see the website <http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/cpg848> and the facsimile *Codex Manesse: Die Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift, Kommentar zum Faksimile des Cod. Pal. Germ. 848 der Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg*, hrsg. von Walter Koschorreck and Wilfried Werner (Frankfurt: Insel-Verl., 1981).

41. Tosefta Avodah Zarah 6:4; Talmud Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah 3:33.

42. Neusner, *Babylonian Talmud*.





Figure 4.  
Detail, *Worms Mahzor*.



Figure 5.  
*Mahzor*, Ashkenaz, 1270–1290. Kaufmann Ms. A 388, vol. II, fol. 12v,  
Magyar Tudományok Akadémia, Budapest.

pagan idolatry. He may thus represent not only the gentiles and their Christian religion, but even their god, namely Jesus himself.

Christian art and literature depict the character of the antichrist, the antithesis of Christ who schemes to deceive the faithful, similarly to Christ himself. Impersonating the true messiah, the antichrist attracts the faithful but leads them to destruction.<sup>43</sup> The devilish hunter in our miniature can be conceived of as a parallel “anti-antichrist,” bearer of the false “New Testament,” purporting to override the

43. Richard Kenneth Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981); Gregory C. Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991); Sara Lipton, “Isaac and the Antichrist in the Archives,” *Past & Present* 32 (2016): 3–44; Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil*

true Torah given to Israel at Mount Sinai. The hunter—Jesus—deceives the faithful by pretending to be the true messiah and even God himself, pretending to redeem humanity. In Christian art, the antichrist can reveal his devilish appearance; in this image, too, the viewer is granted a glimpse of the hunter's true nature.<sup>44</sup>

A figure analogous to the antichrist appears in Jewish literature by the name of Armilus, who can be called the antimessiah. From the seventh century on, references to Armilus are found in midrashim dealing with the topic of salvation. These midrashim describe a war that will take place at the end of time, waged by the nations of the world, led by the antimessiah, against the people of Israel. The messiah's enemy will kill the messiah (son of Joseph), before being killed by the messiah (son of David).<sup>45</sup> The demonic hunter might represent a visual variant of the Jewish antimessiah legends. The appearance of Armilus described in midrashic texts is grotesque; although it does not correspond to the details depicted in our scene, there are parallels. Note that in Christian art, as well, images of the antichrist do not always correspond to the textual descriptions. Just as those miniatures are not illustrations of texts, and at times convey multiple meanings, so too, the demonic hunter is no mere depiction of a specific text. In any case, the illumination's symbolism is allegorical, not a literal interpretation of any texts.

The earliest and principal source of the Armilus story is in the Book of Zerubbabel, written around 628 CE. Another later source is the Midrash Tefillat R. Shimon ben Yohai, written in the last quarter of the twelfth century, before the Third Crusade.<sup>46</sup> In Zerubbabel's vision he is transported to the city of

(San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2000); Rosemary Muir Wright, *Art and Antichrist in Medieval Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

44. Bernard McGinn focused on the antichrist's physiognomic appearance and attempted to map the different ways he is displayed throughout the Middle Ages. Bernard McGinn, "Portraying Antichrist in the Middle Ages," in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. Werner Verbeke, D. Verhelst, Andries Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 1–48; Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), chap. 5.

45. David Berger, "Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus," *AJS Review* 10, no. 2 (1985): 141–64; David Biale, "Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity: The *Sefer Toldot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubbabel*," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 1 (1999): 130–45; Wilhelm Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend: A Chapter in Christian and Jewish Folklore*, trans. A. H. Keane (1896; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999).

46. Yehudah Even-Shmuel, *Midreshe ge'ulah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1954); Adolph Jellinek, ed., *Beit ha-midrash* (Leipzig: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1852), 2:54–57; Joseph Dan, "Armilus: The Jewish Antichrist and the Origins of the *Sefer Zerubbabel*," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Mark Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 73–104; Moshe Gil, "The Apocalypse of Zerubbabel in Judaeo-Arabic," *Revue des études juives* 165, nos. 1–2 (2006): 1–98; Lutz Greisiger, "Armilus – Vorläufer, Entstehung und Fortleben der Antichrist-Gestalt im Judentum," in *Der Antichrist: Historische und systematische Zugänge*, ed. Mariano Delgado and Volker Leppin (Fribourg: Academic Press; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 2011), 207–40; Greisiger, "Die Geburt des Armilus und die Geburt des 'Sohnes des Verderbens': Zeugnisse der jüdisch-christlicher Auseinandersetzung um die Identifikation des Antichristen im 7. Jahrhundert," in *Antichrist: Konstruktionen von Feindbildern*, ed. Wolfram Brandes (Berlin: Akad.-Verl., 2010), 24–32;

Nineveh, where he meets the messiah, son of David. The messiah informs Zerubabel that the city is called “Rome the Great”: “They say that there is a stone of marble in Rome, and it has the shape of a beautiful girl.” According to the Book of Zerubbabel, the stone is shaped like a virgin, and the devil will father her child:

And a male child emerges, in the shape of a man whose height is twelve cubits and whose breadth is two cubits. His eyes are red and crooked, the hair of his head is red like gold, and the steps of his feet are green.<sup>47</sup> ... They call him Armilus. And he will go to Edom [Rome] and say to them: “I am your Messiah, I am your God!” And he will mislead them and they will instantly believe in him, and make him their king. And all the Children of Esau will gather and come to him. And he will go and announce to all cities saying to the Children of Esau: “Bring me **my Torah** [Law] which I gave you!” And the nations of the world will come and bring the book ... and he will [further] say to them: “I am your God, I am your Messiah and your God.” In that hour he will send [a messenger] to Nehemiah [i.e., messiah ben Joseph] and to all Israel, and say to them: “Bring me **your Torah** and testify that I am God.” ... And in that hour Nehemiah will rise ... read before him: “I am the Lord” and “Thou shalt have no other gods” [Exod 20:2–3]. And he will say: “There is nothing of this in your Torah, and I shall not let go of you until you believe that I am God in the manner in which the nations of the world believe in me.” Instantly Nehemiah stands up against him and says to him: “You are not God, but Satan.”<sup>48</sup>

When Armilus speaks to the nations, he calls the Torah “my Torah,” but when he speaks to the people of Israel, he says to them, “Bring me your Torah.” The text distinguishes between the two; the children of Esau received their Law from the antimessiah, whereas the true Law was given to Israel by the true God on Mount Sinai. According to this Jewish reading, the antimessiah, or Armilus, is clearly Jesus.

The name Armilus has intrigued scholars. Some have claimed that the name is adapted from that of Romulus, the founder of Rome. According to David Berger, Jewish messianic typology argues that if the final redeemer will be like the first (i.e., from the house of David), so too will the final king of Rome be like its founder. In this sense, Armilus is Romulus redux.

Another etymological possibility mentioned by Berger is that “Armilus” is derived from the Greek Eremolaos (Ερημόλαος), meaning “destroyer of the people.” The Talmud explains that the Hebrew name Balaam also means

Israel Lévi, “L’apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi Perse Siroés,” *Revue des études juives* 68 (1914): 129–60; 69 (1919): 108–21; 71 (1920): 57–63.

47. We find similar features in several descriptions of the antichrist in Christian literature. See McGinn, “Portraying Antichrist.”

48. Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 157–58. My highlights.

“destroyer of the people.” According to the Hebrew account of the 1240 Talmud dispute, Nicholas Donin claimed that the Talmud states that Jesus was condemned to boiling hot excrement (see B. Gittin 57a), and that Balaam’s punishment is ascribed to Jesus.<sup>49</sup> Balaam is also confused with Bela, son of Beor, the first king of Edom. (Genesis 36:31–32, “And these [are] the kings that reigned in the land of Edom. ... And Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom”; and in 1 Chronicles 1:43, “Now these [are] the kings that reigned in the land of Edom before [any] king reigned over the children of Israel; Bela the son of Beor: and the name of his city [was] Dinhabah.”)<sup>50</sup> According to this logic, because Balaam is identified with both with Esau and Jesus, when the Talmud describes the punishment of Balaam and the criminals of Israel “with boiling hot excrement,” it refers to Jesus.<sup>51</sup> Even if this concept was not actually raised in the Talmud trial itself but recorded only later in the written textual account, it remains highly relevant that it had been written (and probably widespread) by the 1270s, within a few decades of 1240.<sup>52</sup> Hence, Armilus is Romulus, the first king of Rome, and Rome is called Edom, whose first king was Balaam, which is translated into Greek as Eremolaos. So, the first king of Edom/Rome will return at the end of days, as both the final king of Rome and the archenemy of the final redeemer. Moreover, in medieval Jewish literature, Rome and Edom are themselves code names for Christianity and Jesus, so that Armilus may not only represent the three kings, but also be understood as Jesus.

The story of Armilus also appears in *’Arugat ha-bosem*, a collection of commentaries on piyyutim and *seliḥot*, written circa 1234 by Rabbi Abraham ben Azriel of Bohemia (a student of R. Elazar of Worms).<sup>53</sup> The author associates the four kingdoms mentioned in the book of Daniel with the fall of Edom and Christendom. Based on the Book of Zerubbabel, R. Abraham explains that the kingdom will be taken from Edom while he rules over the Land of Israel and that Armilus will receive permission to kill the messiah, son of Joseph, because of the doubters among the people of Israel. He emphasizes that sinners and Jews who convert to Christianity give Armilus power. Thus, R. Abraham deploys the legend of Armilus as a polemic against Christianity and conversion.

49. G. Dalman and H. Laible, *Jesus Christ in the Talmud, Midrash, Zohar, and the Liturgy of the Synagogue* (New York: Arno Press, 1973) (first published in German in 1893), 10, 12, esp. 17–18; Eisenberg, “Reading Medieval Religious Disputation,” 84–88; Galinsky, “Different Hebrew Versions,” 122; Ivan G. Marcus, “A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken, 2002), 2:176–82; Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 82–94.

50. Berger, “Three Typological Themes,” 157–60; Dalman and Laible, *Jesus Christ in the Talmud*, 53–54.

51. Cohen, “Esau as Symbol,” 19–48.

52. Eisenberg, “Reading Medieval Religious Disputation,” 38–40; Hames, “Reason and Faith,” 276–77, 281n39.

53. Abraham Bar Azriel, *’Arugat ha-bosem*, ed. Ephraim Urbach (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1939), 1:256–58. A similar description is found in R. Sa’adiah Gaon, *’Emunot ve-de’ot*, ed. Joseph Kapheh (Kiryat Ono: Mekhon Mosheh, 1999), treatise 8, chap. 5, 245–46.



Just as R. Abraham warns Jews that by converting, they are responsible for Armilus's evil deeds, so too, our image serves as a visual warning to the potential convert: the real leader of the religion of the children of Esau, the noble hunter, is the demonic Armilus.

In summary: Armilus is the son of a stone statue that resembles a virgin and whose father is Satan.<sup>54</sup> His parents remind us of Jesus's parents, only in reverse: a virgin and the Holy Spirit. As in the case of Jesus, the children of Edom believe that Armilus is the messiah and God himself.

Now let us return to our illumination, which portrays the hunter as a demonic creature with a doglike face. As pagan idols, sculptures portraying both women and men are referred to as "dog face"; so too, Armilus, the son of a statue, is depicted with the pagan statue's face of a dog. Furthermore, Armilus pretends to be the messiah and God, he is accepted by the children of Esau, and he wages war against the Torah and the people of Israel, who steadfastly renounce him. The hunter in the *Worms Maḥzor* is associated fundamentally with Esau, who persecutes Jews and their Torah, as do the contemporary medieval Christians who tried to force the Jews to convert. The image in the *Worms Maḥzor* warns the Jewish viewer about the true nature of the alternative that Christianity seductively offers. Esau is unmasked as a demon hunter. He is none other than Armilus, the true face of Jesus, the antimessiah.

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54. A similar story appears in the book *Toledot Yeshu*. Peter Schäfer, M. Meerson and Yacob Deutsch eds., *Toledot Yeshu ('The Life Story of Jesus') Revisited: A Princeton Conference* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).